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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000970

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR INR/R/MR-STHIBEAULT, EUR/PPD-MLOGSDON AND
SRUEDY, EUR/CACEN-ESIDEREAS, EUR, EUR/ACE, EUR/SNEC,
EUR/SE

E.O. 12958; N/A

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SUBJECT: REACTION FROM YEREVAN, ARMENIA: PRESS
CONFERENCE OF AMBASSADOR JOHN ORDWAY

1. SUMMARY: All mass media widely covered Ambassador John Ordway's press conference held on April 22. TV reports were mainly accurate and factual. The press carried fewer commentaries this time than it has in the past. The majority of the newspapers quoted the Ambassador without any comments. Unlike previous press conferences with a wide range of questions asked by the journalists, the main topics discussed this time were the internal political situation in the country, the Armenian Genocide issue and a little bit about Armenian-Turkish relations. Virtually all the papers noted the balanced U.S. position expressed by the Ambassador with regard to the political situation in Armenia. The following is a summary of some of the articles. END SUMMARY

THE AMBASSADOR TRIED TO LOOK NEUTRAL

2. Oppositionist Armenian daily HAYKAKAN ZHAMANAK (04/23) tried to emphasize those parts of the answers that discussed the policy conducted by the authorities. "The leitmotiv of the Ambassador's answers was the necessity of avoiding violence and beginning a dialogue between the authorities and opposition." "The Ambassador's words on beginning a dialogue were more probably addressed to the authorities." "It was obvious that for the Ambassador a principal issue was not to make any statement that would express support for any side. However, he mentioned several times that certain actions by the authorities do not assist in beginning a dialogue. The Ambassador asked a rhetorical question - whether it is possible to expect that the opposition would engage in a dialogue, when, for example, the offices of the opposition parties are being raided."

"WE HOPE THAT THE EVENTS OF APRIL 13 WOULD NOT BE REPEATED"

3. Centrist Armenian language daily AZG (04/23) wrote: "The monthly press conference of U.S. Ambassador John Ordway was entirely about the internal political situation of the country. There was obviously a need for a press conference taking into account recent publications in local as well as foreign press saying that the current situation in Armenia is another version of the Georgian revolution and is the result of cooperation between the opposition and the U.S. National Democratic Institute and the Soros Foundation. As expected, the Ambassador denied this." "During this period the Ambassador had several meetings with representatives of the opposition and the authorities. His position coincided with the formulation widely circulated today, that is, real political processes would start only through dialogue." "However, is it possible to start a dialogue in a deadlocked situation, when the positions of the opposition and the authorities do not contain tolerance for each other, especially after the April 13 events?" "The Ambassador insisted on his opinion, saying that the grounds for a dialogue should be laid by the authorities first of all." "Remaining loyal to the spirit of the U.S. State Department statement, John Ordway repeated that they think that all the arrested people should be released and the raids and closure of party offices is not acceptable. Without doubt, the Ambassador talked about this with the RA President. However, the Ambassador did not think it right to give details of that talk. He just said that the private talks had positive results."

"THE MOST CONSTRUCTIVE WAY IS THROUGH A DIALOGUE"

4. Russian language pro-government RESPUBLIKA ARMENIA (04/23) wrote: "U.S. Ambassador John Ordway started the regular monthly press conference with his welcome in Armenian. After that he invited the journalists to ask questions." "Asked how important are the demands by the opposition and whether the opposition provided grounds for violence, the Ambassador smiled and said that the opposition should ask itself these questions."

U.S. OFFICIAL URGES `RESTRAINT' IN ARMENIAN STANDOFF

15. The Radio Liberty web-site published an article on the press conference. "Ordway also renewed U.S. calls for a dialogue between the two rival camps. But he would not be drawn on what specific compromise deals could resolve the lingering tensions which might again flare up into a violent confrontation next week. Ordway implied that both sides are to blame for the violence, saying that they should now `ask themselves some questions about their activities on that night' and act in `in a responsible manner that avoids violence and confrontation.' But echoing an April 15 statement by the State Department, he did criticize police raids on opposition offices and mass arrests that followed the troubled anti-Kocharian protest. Washington is thought to have played a major role in the bloodless overthrow of then Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, but seems to be walking a more delicate line in Armenia." "In a commentary published by `The Wall Street Journal' last week, David Phillips of America's influential Council on Foreign Relations called for an internationally supervised referendum of confidence in `Mr. Kocharian's corrupt and inept administration.' Ordway made it clear that the government-connected scholar's views do not reflect the official U.S. policy on Armenia."

WALKER